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Background Statement

Dr. Grace Ward

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I am lucky enough to have gone to a high school district that really cared about individual students and met their needs. My school had different programs throughout the whole district that students could use to outsource to. If they were unable to complete school in a timely manner, or needed to be pulled out for behavioral reasons there was a resource room. Some of our students had their classes designated 100 % to the resource room allowing them to have that one on one connection that was necessary for their learning. This was something that I had always valued about my school. As long as you were there and present, each student was allowed to succeed in a way. Having gone to a school in a pretty urban area, a lot of the time there are legal issues for students. The school had a resource officer, legal aids and such to really help the students understand the kinds of struggles they were dealing with. This was a way in which the students could be kept at ease, and allowed to succeed in the educational setting.

My parents were always slightly concerned about sending me to a school in which there were a lot of other kids who didn’t want to be there. What they didn’t realize was that by being in the kind of school I was in, I would find a way to succeed and thrive. As long as I did my best in school and stayed out of trouble, they were happy.

The world that surrounded my school was always surprised by the amount of students that we would graduate. There was a small amount of us that were targeted as the ones who would graduate from when we began. We had the family support, the lack of drug usage, hung out with the right crowd. But the other kids we initially let out to dry. The business support around the school would start to sponsor our sports teams because of the players that they assumed would succeed but that support left very early on in the season every year, for the students who were arrested for all different kinds of illegal activity.

I was honestly never concerned with school. It had always come really easy to me and I never had to worry about it. I was always more concerned with making sure the people around me would succeed just like I knew I would. I never had expectations of my own other than making sure I was doing everything I needed to to succeed. Success to me was finding something that would make me happy, and I found that early on by helping the students around me. We had a school with a lot of peer mentoring, and I was designated as the overarching freshmen mentor, allowing me to come and go through classrooms as I pleased, as long as my work was done. Without desks, all the classrooms had tables that I would just go and sit at and do my best to interact and connect with the students.

The teachers were teaching us to teach really. Most of my teachers were very open to all different ideas and takes in the classroom. There were some who were very traditional and it was honestly pretty hard for them to connect to all of the students because it just didn’t fit. Then there were some who just didn’t understand the concept of traditional teaching at all, and were so out of the box it was hard. There was a balance between everyone really.

Evan Cyzowski, my junior year English teacher, was honestly the most amazing teacher I had in that school for the sole purpose of we learned the exact same way. He was very theatrical and that was exactly what I needed sometimes. In his class we studied a lot of things about World War Two and the material was heavy. He never even tried to lighten it up for us, he just let us have it. It was great.

Because of being a more urban school, we had a huge amount of diversity between the students. The socioeconomic levels were very split, with mostly middle class, but they were not the only ones. The amount of students that came from a lower income family probably outweighed the others, but it wasn’t always as noticeable.

I took a lot of classes that were all connected to humanities. We were a very out of the box kind of school like I had said and humanities was a big focus. We got to build our own programs and where we wanted to be which helped a lot of us become as successful as we have. I knew what I wanted to do so I ran with it. That was the best way really. All of my classes were structured in a way without tests, the amount of feedback we would receive was huge, and it just was a good fit.

I know for a fact that having come from a very open school, I will be more open to different things. Yes, I do learn in a specific way, but I also have been taught in so many other ways that I have experienced a lot of different approaches.

The day that I decided to teach, my mother will say was in second grade, when Brendan Hamilton told me if it wasn’t for him, he never would have learned his fractions. If you ask me, it was the day that I walked into Evan Cyzowski’s class, and we weren’t allowed to walk on his imported rug from Poland, and he made us turn the lights off because it hurt his eyes. Throughout that class with him, he showed us all that we were individuals and that we could become something that people do not expect. He would lecture here and there, but it was mostly us and our opinions. In an English classroom, that is so beneficial for the students. He got us, he wanted to learn about us, and that is something that made him such a superior teacher. I can totally see myself throwing out these crazy ideas from the novels that my students will be reading and seeing where they go with it. That’s what I hope to do, and I know that I will find a way to do so.

I honestly have never looked into this position as something that I will gain anything for myself. There is a saying in the south that my family uses a lot of the time, “Do what makes your heart feel the warmest” and that is what teaching does for me. Being able to see the light bulb turn on for a student sends goose bumps up and down my back. This isn’t something for me to gain, it is something that I will be doing so that all the students who walk through my door will gain something.

I will do everything in my power for those kids. So many people say that I will be worn out after a few years, but I also know my limits. I feel like I could be the one that students go to, but they will come to me, knowing that I might have to redirect them, I might have to be busy sometimes, I might be with another student with a more pressing issue. These are all of the things that continuously run through my head, but I know that I will contribute a safe place for all of these kids to go to.

I fear everyday that I will become comfortable with one idea, and have to change it. I fear that the changes I make to certain things, my students will not like. I do not fear failure as much as I used to, but there is still some sort of fear of failure there. I fear I will not make it. The issues with those fears are that there is no real answer to them; I just have to go out and do it. And that is exactly the plan.